Recent Dutch-Language Publications

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Ewald Vanvugt, *Roofstaat. Wat iedere Nederlander moet weten*. Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar/Top Notch, 2016, 856 pp. ISBN 9789038801278. Price: EUR 39.99 (paperback).

Ewald Vanvugt (1943) is a prolific and important author who challenges the Dutch government and society to face their dark and bloody past, in particular that of the Dutch East and West Indies. Since 1985 he has been publishing work on the role of opium in colonial society, the robbery of art and cultural treasures which continue to fill Dutch museums, the occupation of Bali, and studies of the critics of various colonial schemes. He collected and combined the early books in *Zwartboek van Nederland overzee* (2002, 352 pp), which was expanded as *Nieuw zwartboek van Nederland overzee* (2011, 576 pp.). Now, in *Roofstaat* he presents his definitive encyclopaedia of Dutch historical crimes through the ages, in more than 850 pages, including and expanding the *Zwartboek* titles. In more than 150 separate chronological chapters, he discusses the events that transgressed the rules of humanity. Vanvugt certainly expresses moral indignation, but far more than that. His work is meticulous and is solidly founded on the historical accounts, from old sources and contemporary historians, as 1450 references and 35 pages of bibliography attest. *Roofstaat* contains a litany of violence, cruelty, perjury, broken agreements, and unscrupulousness. With their privateering and piracy, the first culprits are the East and West Indies Company, VOC and WIC. Soon both engaged in the slave trade on a grand scale, with the VOC dependent on the input of slave labour. With the Dutch state taking over the Netherlands Indies colony in 1815 a new era began—with ruthless killings, made easier by the superior fire power of the Dutch army that brought about the Pax Neerlandica. At first the costly colonial enterprise was financed by the forced labour of the Indonesian population and the official exploitation of an opium monopoly, which was established and maintained through the promotion of its use among Indonesians and Chinese. During ‘pacification’ the Indies treasures, when not looted or destroyed, were confiscated and sent

to the motherland. Vanvugt rightfully points out the erotic and exotic attraction of the tropical colonies which lured western men to the East, offering an escape from rigid Dutch norms.

There is thus not much to be proud of, and the writing on the colonial past has for the most part covered up the violent outrages. According to Vanvugt, Dutch historians of today have purposefully evaded these sensitive subjects. This may now be too general an observation. Recently, solid books on the opium trade and East Indies slavery have been published. The monograph of Gerrit Knaap also offers new evidence on the military exploits of the VOC. And already for some years the pressure to study the Dutch military actions in the 1945–1949 decolonisation war has been rising. Gert Oostindie's *Soldaat in Indonesië* collects the irrefutable evidence that war crimes were committed by the Dutch troops on a considerable scale. And new proof of this is forthcoming. But Vanvugt does not deal with these decolonisation conflicts in a commensurate way. His chronological approach sometimes leads to repetition and omission—the Aceh War, for instance, does not get the attention it merits. And Vanvugt does not address a serious general question about his approach. What are his criteria to devote a chapter of *Roofstaat* to a particular event? Especially for the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, present-day norms and values cannot be applied unsparingly. However, even then a number of basic values were adhered to, and cases of excessive violence, like Coen's massacre of Banda's inhabitants, were reprimanded by the VOC board and censured by contemporaries. Thus there was clearly a category of action that fell beyond contemporary norms. It would have been helpful for Vanvugt to discuss his selection criteria for the events he includes. But this issue aside, Vanvugt deserves ample praise for the results of decades of research.

Willem Anton Engelbrecht, Pieter Johannes van Herwerden and Sjoerd de Meer (eds), *Voorbij het eind van de wereld. De ontdekkingsreis van Jacob le Maire en Willem Cornelis Schouten, 1615–1617*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2015, 35+xxvi+[19]+235+xv+265 pp. ISBN 9789057305238. Price: EUR 74.14. (hardback). [Reprint of volume 49 of the *Werken van de Linschoten-Vereeniging*, originally published in 1945 by Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag.]

Four hundred years ago, on 29 January 1616, the small Dutch ship 'Eendracht' discovered and rounded Cape Hoorn. It was part of the endeavour of the wealthy Amsterdam merchant Isaac le Maire to find the way to the mysterious Zuidland for which he founded the Australische Compagnie. It was a secret expedition, as he was in conflict with the VOC and his exploits infringed upon

the navigation monopoly the VOC had been granted by the Dutch Republic. Australia was not found, but at last, after anchoring at many exotic islands, the Moluccas and Batavia were reached. The reception was unfriendly: the ship was confiscated. Upon return the ship's journey caught the imagination of many. Two journals were published: 'Journael ofte beschrijvinghe van de wonderlicke reyse', by captain Schouten (first in 1618) and 'Spiegel der Australische navigatie', by expedition leader Jacob le Maire, son of Isaac (first in 1622). The journals were very popular: many reprints, and translations in at least six languages. The standard edition of the journals was published in a two-volume edition in 1945 by the Linschoten-Vereeniging. Part of the commemoration now of the first passage four centuries ago is the photomechanical reprint of the 1945 edition, with a solid new introduction by Sjoerd de Meer in which he updates the information on the three years' journey. The reprint was supported by two Dutch foundations: de Stichting Nederlandse Kaap Hoorn-vaarders, and the Stichting 400 Jaar Kaap Hoorn.

Hans Derks, *Verslaafd aan opium. De VOC en het Huis van Oranje als drugs-dealers*. Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak&Van Genneep, 2015, 139 pp. ISBN 9789025307097. Price: EUR 17.50 (paperback).

This small book is based on the voluminous scholarly study of 850 pages: *History of the opium problem. The assault on the East, ca. 1600–1950*, published in 2012 by Brill. Hans Derks has selected and abridged from it the parts on the role of the Dutch Republic, the VOC, and since 1815, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and its colonial rulership in the East Indies. He characterises the VOC as a military trade organisation, basing itself on violence to obtain a monopoly. The belligerent policy of the stadtholders of the House of Orange was in no small measure responsible for this course of action. To find a way out of its economic distress the VOC around the 1640s discovered opium and actively engaged in trade and promotion of the use of opium. Thus the Dutch—later copied by the British—purposefully created an opium problem to foster their colonial enterprise. Enormous profits were made, and by widespread corruption a lot of high officials, in the Netherlands and the Indies, managed to amass enormous riches. Among them was the House of Orange, with Stadtholder Willem V—consistently nicknamed 'De Dikke' (The Fat) by Derks—and King Willem I. The VOC depended for an essential part on its opium income, turning the Indies into a narco-military state. An opium infrastructure was set up with an Amfoen Sociëteit in the 1740s, which was later supplanted by the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij (1824) and the Opiumregie. The disas-

trous social effects of the opium addiction were belittled or rationalised as the opium income was essential to ensure the colonial rule—10 to 15 % of its income was derived from it. In total about 80 billion in present-day euros were extracted from the Indies colony. Derks has written a provocative book, and evades polished academic discourse to make his arguments. These are for the greater part convincing and worth serious discussion.

Jacqueline Bel, *Bloed en rozen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1900–1945*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2015, 1141 pp. ISBN 9789035130470. Price: EUR 65.00 (hardback).

The Nederlandse Taalunie (Language Union) is the authoritative institute created by the Dutch and Flemish governments to follow developments in the Dutch language and to safeguard and promote issues concerning the Dutch language. One of its initiatives, supported by both governments in 1997, commissioned a new 'Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur' (History of the Dutch literature). It was an ambitious project, and resulted in an eight-volume series. Up till now seven volumes have been published; the penultimate one came out in 2006, and the last one is due to appear this year. Jacqueline Bel, a Professor of Dutch literature at Free University in Amsterdam, has recently published her account on the years 1900 till 1945, and needed more than 1,100 pages to do so. Neither dull nor verbose, her history is more comprehensive than its predecessors. It is also more integrated, which is appropriate for a project of Dutch and Flemish authors. Bel's focus goes beyond the strict literary viewpoint, continually connecting literature with developments in the wider society, such as the two world wars, the rise of Soviet Russia, the Boer War in South Africa, the civil war in Spain, and the great totalitarian ideologies of communism and fascism. In addition to these, emancipation, democratisation, and the development of mass media exercised their influence, mostly outside the literary canon. Thus, in addition to chronicling the developments and debates in 'traditional' literature, Bel devotes a lot of attention to authors inspired by socialism and communism, as well as fascism and national socialism. Another literary stepchild gets well-deserved attention as well. Colonial literature is discussed in a number of subchapters, in which the East Indies titles are presented together with the almost forgotten Congo titles. The West Indies literature, except for a few authors, was still in its infancy. Bel, who has written on colonial literature before, rehabilitates colonial authors, and following the journal *Indische Letteren* has an eye for the wider context of these titles, and does not judge these solely on the basis of their literary merits. However, the survey of colonial

literature does not result in 'new' names. Louis Couperus' *De stille kracht* (translated as *The hidden force*) is discussed as a novel characteristic for an epoch, as is E. du Perron's *Het land van herkomst*. Familiar names like Augusta de Wit, Madelon Székely-Lulofs and Beb Vuyk are present, but also Indonesians writing in Dutch: Noto Soeroto, Soewarsih Djojopoespito, and Sjahrir. Altogether colonial literature gets allotted about 75 pages. All in all, this reference work is of great value and indispensable as a guide to the literary world of the first half of the twentieth century.

Lodewijk Kallenberg, *Irawan Soejono 1920–1945. 'Henk van de Bevrijding': Verzetsheld van Indonesische afkomst*. Leiden: Stichting tot Instandhouding van de Begraafplaats Groenesteeg, 2016, 48 pp. No ISBN. Price: EUR 5.00 (to order from secretariaatgroenesteeg@gmail.com) (paperback).

Irawan Soejono (1920–1945) was a student in Leiden, from an aristocratic Javanese family. His father Pangeran Soejono (1886–1943) was the first and only Indonesian with ministerial rank in the Dutch government, then in exile in London during the German occupation of the Netherlands. Irawan, a member of the leftist student group Perhimpunan Indonesia (PI), with a considerable number of his fellow-students, joined the Dutch resistance, and they were active in a broad field of activities: publication and distribution of illegal journals, housing of underground resistance fighters and preparation for military action against the Germans. These were risky endeavours, and many of the group were interned or died. Among the last was Irawan Soejono, who was shot down by the Germans on 13 January 1945 in Leiden when trying to escape from a *razzia*. He was temporarily buried in the Groenesteeg Cemetery. After the war he was cremated and his ashes brought to Indonesia. Only recently has interest in the disproportionate devotion of the Indonesians to the cause of the Dutch liberation risen, and with this interest an appreciation for their courage. Last year a memorial plaque for Irawan was put in place on the Groenesteeg Cemetery. The Cemetery has now published a booklet in which Lodewijk Kallenberg, chairman of the Groenesteeg Foundation, brings together the facts about the short life of Irawan, placed in context by information about the Soejono family, the PI, its illegal magazine and its activities. As such, it is a tribute to a young man, whose courageous resistance activities are thus not forgotten. Kallenberg's survey is well-documented: he lists fifty sources, and includes more than fifty illustrations.

Peter Penders (ed.), *Veldpost Sumatra*. Leeuwarden: Elikser, 2016, 339 pp. ISBN 9789089548399. Price: EUR 19.95 (paperback).

Han de Haas (1926–2004), who grew up in the Brabant Catholic countryside, was sent as a conscript to Indonesia in May 1947 to fight in the decolonisation war against the Republic of Indonesia. He returned in March 1950, after almost three years of frontline service as a car driver in East Sumatra, where Medan and Tarutung were his bases of action. All through these years he kept a diary, with details on his daily experiences and notes on his own political development—from a loyal supporter of Dutch aims and a faithful Catholic to a cynical and negative observer of daily army practices and official Dutch mission. He also relates the army shortcomings and the boredom, resulting in undisciplined behaviour. The regular loss of comrades in a cruel guerrilla war—he reported each case—is more and more seen as a useless sacrifice. Among the many accounts of veterans this diary ranks among the more informative ones. The diary was edited by journalist Peter Penders. He omitted superfluous information, and added informative notes, with a number of mistakes that could have been avoided.

B. Bouman, *Succes in een verloren oorlog. Het 6e Regiment Veldartillerie en zijn Speciale Troepen in de onafhankelijkheidsstrijd van de Republiek Indonesië, 1946–1949*. Nijmegen: QV Uitgeverij, 2015, 140 pp. ISBN 9789082080070. Price: EUR 18.95 (paperback).

The retired General Ben Bouman (1923–2015) started his career as a young officer in the 6th Regiment Veldartillerie (6vA) (Field Artillery) that fought against Indonesia's striving for independence. His 6vA was posted in northern West-Java, a region with a reputation for rebelliousness, from October 1946 until October 1949. After his military career Bouman became a historian, wrote a PhD in 1995 and published on the Indonesian-Dutch decolonisation war, with a focus on internal developments in the Indonesian army. He based his work on Indonesian documents and interviews with his former foes. At a late age he returned to his own military service and recorded the military history of his own unit. The almost 700 men of 6vA were responsible for an extensive sector, with a lot of 'official' (Indonesian Army) and 'unofficial' (irregular units and bands) opponents. 6vA was successful in the pacification of its sector, by constant and untiring patrolling and surveillance, as well as conscious efforts to win the hearts and minds of the population. In this respect 6vA also looked for reinforcement by recruiting Indonesian soldiers. They became a regular force

of 300 men as *Speciale Troepen* (ST), in which the notorious Westerling was also involved. They were a close partner with 6VA, and successful in action. However, they were guilty of a number of violations of what seems to have been war crimes. 6VA sought the support of a few hundred *Ondernemingswachten*, semi-military men with the specific task to guard the plantations and enterprises in the region. Bouman is proud to have served in 6VA, which was in his opinion successful in maintaining Dutch authority and peace and quiet, at the cost of 25 casualties in Dutch ranks, and hundreds of Indonesian victims—hence the title ‘Success in a lost war’. Bouman has done thorough research, in Dutch archives, as well as by interviewing comrades-in-arms and Indonesian veterans. 168 notes attest to this. He enlivens his account by many quotations, and a great number of illustrations. Still, inevitably for a book like this, for a considerable part the work merely enumerates factual information.

Wim Straathof, *Agama Djawa Sunda—Java Sunda beweging: Het verhaal van een andersdenkende groepering in een overwegend islamitisch land: Indonesië 1964–1971*. Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2015, 169 pp. ISBN 9789056254445. Price: EUR 15.95 (paperback).

Wim Straathof (1936) was a priest and sent to West-Java in 1964 to work among the Sundanese. He soon, in the village of Cigugur, came in contact with the followers of the Agama Djawa Sunda, a syncretist movement, counted to belong to the *kebatinan* religion, a designation for a wide variety of local and regional religious movements that fell outside the ‘officially’ acknowledged religions. Their fate was sometimes uncertain. The Agama Djawa Sunda also experienced this in 1964 when its marriages were denied official recognition. This rejection touched on its very existence, and the Agama turned to the Catholic Church for a way out in seeking cooperation and even affiliation. By chance, Straathof and a few colleagues became closely involved in the process. He studied the scattered writings of the Agama founder Pangeran Madrais (1835–1940), and presented his learnings in a systematized format in a number of brochures. This description is the basis for his exposition and analysis of the Agama Djawa Sunda in this book. It is a remarkable set of beliefs and guidelines, of a sophistication that may well compete with that of the great religions, and as to its dynamics, anthropocentrism, tolerance, inclusiveness, and harmony on a par with these great religions. It is all admirably presented by Straathof, who after his Sunda years studied cultural anthropology, in the first seventy pages of his book. The sequel that follows on geography, history and culture of Indonesia on a general level could better have been replaced with the story

of the process of cooperation between Agama and the Catholic Church. Did the Agama change its views, and how did the Catholics adjust to the Agama learnings? And how did the Agama fare after 1964, and up until now? Straathof only offers glimpses of these. The reader is thus left wanting more.

Roanne van Voorst, *De beste plek ter wereld. Leven in de sloppen van Jakarta*. Amsterdam: Brandt, 2016, 239 pp. ISBN 9789492037329. Price: EUR 17.50 (paperback).

Anthropologist Roanne van Voorst (1987) did research in Jakarta in a slum on the bank of a river, with the initial and specific purpose of researching how the population reacted to and coped with the irregular flooding that has been increasing and worsening with climate change and urbanisation. She immersed herself in one such slum for a year (between 2009 and 2011), and wrote a Ph.D at the University of Amsterdam: *Get Ready for the Flood! Risk-handling Styles in Jakarta, Indonesia* (2014), which was revised and published in 2016 as *Natural Hazards, Risk and Vulnerability: Floods and Slum Life in Indonesia* (London: Routledge). These scholarly accounts are now supplemented with the story of her own personal experiences as a slum villager, sharing, to a great extent, the life of her research subjects. This brought with it a lot of hardships, but also surprising insights in the resilience of the slum dwellers who although living in extreme poverty manage to cope with external threats—of which the recurring floods and the ever looming danger of clearance of the slum area by the government were the most critical. But besides these ongoing hazards, villagers face the threat of fire in the overcrowded slum area, and are always subject to illness, with medical care unavailable due to a lack of money.

Van Voorst had great trouble finding a research area, with uncooperative government officials and suspicious inhabitants of potential research areas. By sheer luck she at last found a place, by following, after a chance meeting, a young slum dweller, who praised his slum as ‘the best place in the world’ (*de beste plek ter wereld*). She was invited to stay, and as a participant observer took part in the everyday slum life. Floods ravaged her slum three times and a fire made hundreds of people homeless. On a daily basis corruption ensured a smooth course of events, alternative medicines and home treatment replaced official medical care, and intricate systems of savings and loans made more expensive purchases possible. Van Voorst relates this all in a fluid style, often couched in irony, and adds to this her own personal experiences and feelings. She clearly expresses love, admiration, and compassion for these destitute Indonesians who survive with grim optimism in hopeless circumstances. Van

Voorst shows her protagonists to be real people for whom one feels sympathy. It is all the more moving then that in an epilogue she relates how in 2015 the slum area was violently cleared and its dwellers driven away. A society based on an intricate set of rules and norms thus was scattered, with no chance of reinstatement.